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# Nietzsche on Spiritual Illness and Its Promise

FREDERICK NEUHOUSER

**ABSTRACT:** This article reconstructs Nietzsche's conception of spiritual illness, especially as exhibited in various forms of the bad conscience, and asks what positive, ennobling potential Nietzsche finds in it. The relevant concept of spirit is arrived at by reconstructing Nietzsche's conception of life and then considering what reflexive life—life turned back against itself—would look like. It distinguishes four independent features of spiritual illness: the measureless drive to make oneself suffer, self-opacity (or mendaciousness), life denial, and a self-undermining dynamic in which life exhausts the sources of its own vitality. The article ends by considering various suggestions as to how these features of spiritual illness might also be preconditions of great spiritual health, including the preconditions for erecting new "ideals."

**KEYWORDS:** Nietzsche, pathology, theodicy, bad conscience, life

The topic of this article is Nietzsche's conception of spiritual illness insofar as it plays a role in his project of cultural critique. What makes this aspect of Nietzsche's thought especially interesting is his suggestion that spiritual illness introduces into the world the very conditions from which a cure for that illness might be drawn, conditions that, beyond merely restoring the diseased to a previous state of health, also possess the potential for making human existence higher or nobler than it could have been if humans had never fallen ill in the first place. This is clearly the idea behind Nietzsche's striking statement in the *Genealogy of Morals* that the bad conscience is an illness, but of the sort that pregnancy is (*GM* II:19), namely, an illness that is "full of a future [ein Zukunftsvolles]" (*GM* II:16).<sup>1</sup> In this general respect Nietzsche can be seen as following in the footsteps of an earlier "genealogist," Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who attempts a similar project in examining the dangers as well as the spiritual promise of a specific form of self-love, *amour-propre*.<sup>2</sup> In order to bring Nietzsche's treatment of illness better into focus, it will help to begin with a brief look at how the trope of illness as cure (or illness as the enhancer of human existence) is at work in Rousseau.

As his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (or Second Discourse)<sup>3</sup> makes clear, Rousseau locates the fundamental source of the illnesses he finds in human society in the distinctively human passion of *amour-propre*, the source of human

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beings' pervasive and ineliminable yearning to "have a position, to be a part, to count for something"<sup>4</sup> in the eyes of others, a yearning, in other words, to win the esteem, admiration, approval—in short, the recognition—of others. For Rousseau *amour-propre* is a source of pathology in human society because it gives rise to an especially deep and persistent form of dependence among human beings, who rely on the good opinion of others as a condition of their own self-affirmation. The urgency of humans' need to have their value confirmed by others easily leads to pathology for Rousseau not only because it poses a major obstacle to freedom—how can beings who depend on others for so basic a need as self-affirmation avoid becoming "enslaved" to the opinions of those on whose recognition they depend?—but also because the comparative nature of the recognized standing they seek encourages the development of what Rousseau calls "feverish" and "inflamed" desires that are virtually impossible to satisfy.

The problems that *amour-propre* introduces into human existence are too manifold to describe in detail here, but one example may illuminate Rousseau's general claim that *amour-propre* tends to engender not merely competition and frustration but also *diseased* forms of human striving. Call this example the "rat race" phenomenon (or "keeping up with the Joneses"). This problem stems from the fact that when the quest for comparative standing turns, as it easily does, into a quest for *superior* standing, satisfaction tends to be insecure and short-lived, especially when many subjects desire the same for themselves. For in order to outdo the competitor who has just overtaken me, or to maintain the preeminence I now enjoy, I must constantly be engaged in enhancing my own current standing. In such a situation, individuals are burdened with an unending need to better their own positions in response to, or in anticipation of, their rivals' advances, and this results in an unceasing game of one-upmanship. What makes this form of *amour-propre* inflamed or feverish is not merely that the only satisfaction it can find will be fleeting and insecure but also that desires become boundless in a way that precludes true satisfaction. Such infinitely expanding desires impose on individuals the need to expend vast amounts of labor and energy in pursuit of the goods and honors they hope will satisfy their drive for superior standing. But no matter how elaborate and exhausting, such schemes are inimical to satisfaction, first because the labor they require usually exceeds the satisfaction they bring and, second, because once our motivations have been permeated by inflamed *amour-propre* to this degree, we lose the capacity to enjoy our possessions and achievements for themselves, apart from the role they might play in exhibiting our value to others.

That Rousseau regards *amour-propre* as a principal source of human ills is easily gleaned from even a cursory reading of the Second Discourse or *Emile*. It is the obverse side of this doctrine that has remained largely hidden from his readers, namely, his claim that, in addition to being the direct source of a wealth of goods human existence would be much poorer without (love, friendship,

and human excellences of nearly every kind), *amour-propre* furnishes us with a large part of the subjective resources we need if we are to become rational, self-determining, and morally virtuous.<sup>5</sup> The basic idea is that in seeking to satisfy their passion for recognition, humans are led to establish relations to other subjects that have the effect of developing in them cognitive capacities that open up new possibilities—for reason, morality, and self-determination—otherwise unavailable to them. In other words, in addition to being the cause of human ills, *amour-propre* has a positive *educative* potential, a capacity to form human subjects in ways that enable them not only to recover from but also to rise above their diseased state.

Here, too, Rousseau's view is too complicated to be explained in detail, but its core is the claim that, among the various components of human nature, only *amour-propre* has the potential to train human subjects to take up the evaluative perspective of others—a perspective beyond that of one's immediate desires and likes and without which rational evaluation, reflection, and self-determination would be impossible. (It should be noted that the question of what formative processes human *animals* have to go through in order to become *subjects* capable of taking up new perspectives on themselves is as central to Nietzsche's thought as it is to Rousseau's.) One attractive feature of Rousseau's view—another respect in which he is closer to Nietzsche than one might expect—is that, in contrast to Kant, Hegel, and Marx, his vision of the redemptive potential of human illness allows no room for the thought of a beneficent Providence that makes the ennoblement of the species necessary or even likely. Rousseau might be thought of as carrying on the tradition of Christian theodicy, but if so, his theodicy dispenses with guarantees and optimism and contents itself with pointing out merely the *possibility* of convalescence and redemption, knowledge of which might direct our practices in beneficial ways but might just as well remain without effect.

That Nietzsche intends to make a claim about spiritual illness of the same general type as Rousseau's is evident in his characterization of the bad conscience as at once sickness and pregnancy. Beyond this, however, almost nothing about Nietzsche's position is easy to figure out. In addition to the question of which aspects of the bad conscience are potentially productive and why, it is far from clear what precise meaning the concept of sickness has for him, especially when it is taken beyond the realm of the purely biological and applied to human—or *spiritual*—phenomena. These are the questions the remainder of this article addresses.

The bad conscience, Nietzsche tell us, involves suffering—"a feeling of misery, a leaden discomfort" (*GM* II:16)—but this alone fails to explain why it is an illness. Suffering is a normal part of life processes; it plays an essential role in life's characteristic striving to create ever greater units of power through injury, destruction, domination, and so on (*GM* II:11). Nor is the fact that its suffering is self-inflicted sufficient to explain why the bad conscience is an

illness; healthy life processes, too, involve pain whose source is nothing other than life itself. At the same time, suffering (and self-inflicted suffering) seem to be relevant to understanding what makes the bad conscience an illness, for when Nietzsche describes “the most horrifying” form the bad conscience has thus far assumed (in Christianity and its aftermath), he emphasizes its character as “self-torture” (*GM* II:22).

If illness is not identical with suffering, then what distinguishes them? The obvious place to turn for an answer is illness’s contrast concept, health. Since health is a biological concept, in doing so we immediately encounter Nietzsche’s concept of life, together with its account of what the healthy functioning of a living organism consists in. Life, Nietzsche tells us, is a goal-directed process, a series of activities that aims at power—at creating ever “*greater* units of power”—and that pursues this aim through various kinds of forceful, pain-inducing activity such as “injuring, violating, exploiting, destroying” (*GM* II:11). As a first approximation, then, we could say that illness involves some disturbance in, or blocking of, this essential life activity. Even if the impeding of this activity typically brings pain along with it, suffering is not the defining characteristic of illness.

Students of Kant and Hegel (and of the early nineteenth century in general) might rush to conclude from this definition of vital activity that life is a teleological process, but having an aim is not equivalent to having a *telos*. If “teleological” implies that the process in question has a determinate end at which it aims, the character of which determines from the outset the course the process takes and the achievement of which brings the process to a satisfying completion—then life for Nietzsche has an aim but no *telos* (*GM* II:12) (and therefore no foreseeable stopping point at which the process is completed and “satisfaction” is achieved).

When Nietzsche says that life seeks ever greater units of power, it can sound like its aim is definable in purely quantitative terms, much like the aim Marx finds at work in the circulation of capital—the unceasing accumulation of surplus value—which, as an abstract, purely quantitative aim, explains the restless, unending, infinitely intensified but never satisfied nature of economic activity in capitalism. There are, indeed, aspects of the logic of capitalist accumulation that Nietzsche ascribes to the processes of life. That life seeks the creation of *ever greater* units of power is meant to signal that Hegelian notions of completion and satisfaction are out of place in understanding vital processes and that those processes are infinitely open-ended and undetermined in ways that the acorn’s transformation into an oak is not.

More important, the absence of a *telos* in the strict sense implies that discrete activities of life for Nietzsche are like the economic activities that serve capitalist accumulation in being intrinsically “meaningless”—which is to say that in themselves they lack the meaning that an external observer can ascribe to the stages in the normal course of an oak’s development, where the specific features

of each stage are explained by reference to the essential characteristics of the end toward which that development tends, an end that “determines” how that development proceeds. To be more precise, in the case of capitalist accumulation, particular acts aimed at extracting ever greater quantities of surplus value from the circulation of capital have no significance beyond the quantitative aim that governs all such acts. From the perspective of what capitalist accumulation is after, it is a matter of complete indifference whether surplus value is created from the production of shoes or automobiles or luxury yachts, and from that same perspective, production can move, abruptly and with no internal logic, from one sphere into another, depending on where at any particular moment surplus value is to be made. There is, in other words, nothing about the process’s aim that determines the specific nature of the movements that make up the process, which means that the qualitative details of the process have no meaning in relation to the overall aim of the process itself. Like capitalist accumulation, the course taken by processes of life has no internal logic that makes sense of its specific moments; they are not, strictly speaking, steps in a *development* but random, unorganized, intrinsically meaningless events: a “succession of [. . .] more or less independent [. . .] processes” (*GM* II:12).

Thus, the activities of life for Nietzsche are like those of capitalist accumulation in that both proceed in the service of one determining aim definable in terms of a quantitative increase in a single good (power, in the case of life, and surplus value, in the case of capital). This is a significant commonality, but it should not blind us to an even more significant difference: life for Nietzsche—including nonhuman life—seeks something beyond a merely quantitative increase in power. Unlike the capitalist drive to accumulate surplus value, life has also a qualitative aim: it also seeks to impose, retrospectively, a coherent form on what first appear as (and are) random, unrelated events. It is tempting to overlook this aspect of Nietzsche’s conception of life, in part because it seems to anthropomorphize nature, ascribing to all living organisms the capacity to *interpret* past events, to impose a coherent order on occurrences that of themselves possess no such order. Yet it is clearly Nietzsche’s intention to ascribe an order-imposing function of this kind to life itself, in all its forms. This can be seen in the fact that he describes life as striving not only for increases in power but also for increasing “perfection [Vollkommenheit]” (*GM* II:12).

It is with this claim that Nietzsche introduces into his conception of life the idea of teleological organization that previous philosophers regarded as life’s constitutive feature. For “perfection” refers to a kind of hierarchical organization, where higher (or “nobler”) functions rule over (or “dominate”) lower functions (*GM* II:1), making the living being into a purposefully ordered whole—into, in other words, an *organism*, in which specialized functions work together so as to further the vital ends of the whole. At the same time, Nietzsche’s understanding of the purposeful order that characterizes life has two features that distinguish

it from more familiar accounts. The first is that, as we have seen, the governing aim of the organism as a whole is taken to be not self-preservation but increasing power (even if self-preservation is a necessary condition of increasing power). The second is that the teleological organization characteristic of life is not prescribed to the living being in advance, written into its DNA, as it were; instead, it is an organization that the living being must actively produce and that, once produced, must continually be reproduced, and not merely in the same form as before but in ever evolving, higher forms, which presumably are necessary if increasing power rather than static self-maintenance is the ultimate aim to be served.

This second feature of Nietzsche's conception of life is bound up with his odd claim that interpretation is a central activity of life, a claim that clearly calls for further elaboration. Here is the most explicit formulation of this thesis, which, not coincidentally, Nietzsche places at the center of the *Genealogy's* three essays: "every happening in the organic world is an *overpowering*, a *mastering*, and every overpowering and mastering is itself a re-interpreting, a fitting into place, in which previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' must be obscured or completely extinguished" (*GM* II:12). According to this passage, processes of life are acts of overpowering and domination in which the assertion of power consists in changing the meaning, or purpose, of that which is overpowered. To change the meaning or purpose of something is to reinterpret it, which in its broadest sense refers to the ordering insertion (*Einordnung*) of "something present, something that has somehow come to be," "into a system of purposes" (*GM* II:12). To interpret, then, to give something a meaning, is to impose a function on what is at first merely "present" (or "there") by incorporating it into a system of purposeful activities with which it then cooperates in order to serve a purpose of the organic unity as a whole: "all purposes [. . .] are merely *signs* that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed on it [. . .] the meaning of a function" (*GM* II:12). So life strives not merely for greater quantities of power however achievable but, more specifically, for increases in power that result from the imposition of organic order on a given material that of itself lacks significance, which it acquires only after having been commandeered by a superior power and forced to play a certain function within that imposed order. Life is essentially interpretation because it assigns a meaning-in-relation-to-the-whole to the intrinsically meaningless. Understood in this way, it is not difficult to see why, after Darwin, life might be construed as essentially "interpretive": if evolution is a central function of life, then living beings must have the ability to take up random, meaningless variations in their own constitution and employ them for their own vital purposes by assigning them new functions within an already established but now "readjusted"<sup>6</sup> organic unity.

Focusing on evolution as an essential life activity directs our attention to a further feature of Nietzsche's conception of life, which, though important for

Darwin, could equally well have been appropriated from Hegel's treatment of life: for all three thinkers the species, not individual living organisms, constitutes the basic unit of life in the sense that certain vital functions can be understood only as processes of the species as a whole (and not of its individual members themselves). In the case of Darwin what evolves is, strictly speaking, the species, not individual organisms, and even if the species' evolution depends on changes that can take place only within individual organisms, it remains an essentially transgenerational process that, unlike digestion or respiration, cannot be carried out by a single living being. That for Nietzsche the basic unit of life is the species can be seen in his view—shared with Hegel—that death (of individuals) is a constitutive and therefore normal part of the life process (*GM* II:12). If the deaths of individuals belong “to the real conditions of the *progressus* of life” (*GM* II:2), then the vital purpose served by those deaths must belong to some living entity larger than the individuals themselves. If “life” referred primarily to individual living beings, it would make no sense to characterize it as a *progressus* toward greater power since this unidirectional course is not a possibility for individual living beings. Even if much of an individual's life consists in increasing its power and complexity, this is clearly not its ultimate destiny.<sup>7</sup>

On the basis of what I have said until now, there could seem to be an important ambiguity in Nietzsche's understanding of the power that life processes are said to seek. Thus far, relying on the second essay of the *Genealogy*, I have characterized life as aiming at ever “greater units of power” (*GM* II:11), which can make it sound as though life's aim were the acquisition of ever more powerful *capacities*. In the third essay, however, Nietzsche says something slightly different, namely, that “every animal [. . .] strives instinctively for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can completely expend its force [Kraft] and achieve its maximum feeling of power [Machtgefühl]” (*GM* III:7). According to this statement, what well-functioning forms of life seek are the conditions (presumably both internal and external) under which they can achieve ever greater *feelings* of power, where such feelings consist in a pleasure or satisfaction experienced by living organisms when, through their own activity, they bring about the discharge of a quantum of energy that has built up within them and presses for release. What life forms ultimately seek, then, is the discharge of their own energy (through activity) or, more precisely, an unending series of discharges of ever greater quanta of their own energy, together with the ever greater feelings of power that accompany those discharges. Yet even though the organism's subjective experience is an important element of Nietzsche's account of life's aim, it would be a mistake to reduce that aim to the mere feeling of power, as if what the living organism sought were simply a pleasurable subjective state. What life seeks, rather, is the entire process, carried out in the world, through which it creates the conditions for discharge and then through activity expends the energy it has acquired. Even if the accompanying pleasurable subjective



state were able to endure (which it is not), no single feeling of power would suffice to satisfy the living being, which seeks instead to repeat, at ever higher levels, the entire world-immersed process of the building up and discharge of energy. On this understanding of life's aim one can explain why living beings seek greater capacities for power (as means to ever greater discharge) without that being its ultimate aim.

We are now in a position to describe from the "biological perspective" (*GM* II:11)—the perspective of animal life—what health and illness for living beings consist in. If we restrict ourselves to individual organisms, then health consists in a more or less undisturbed carrying out of the life process: the animal's ongoing imposition of organic order on itself to create ever greater units of power for the purpose of discharging ever greater quanta of energy through activity (within the limits of an organism's normal life span).<sup>8</sup> Biological health is equated with an organism's vitality—a "flourishing, rich, self-overflowing" condition, manifested in "powerful physicality" and in "strong, free, cheerful activity" (*GM* I:7) that springs from "plenitude, force [Kraft], the will of life" (*GM* P:3). By the same logic, illness consists in an enduring, premature disruption of the life process, including mere repetitions of the process in which energy is expended and renewed but sluggishly and at more or less constant levels. Its characteristics are the opposites of those of health: powerlessness, passivity, reactivity, leadenness, depression, and perhaps most important, the incapacity to impose order, or meaning, on encountered facts or events.

Yet this conception of illness, formulated from the merely biological perspective, is insufficient to capture the distinctively human, or *spiritual*, illnesses Nietzsche is most interested in. In order to understand these we need to take up a perspective beyond that of mere life, one that allows us to grasp spiritual and not merely animal phenomena. The sense in which the spiritual perspective is beyond that of mere life must not be misunderstood. "Beyond" does not mean that one abandons the standpoint of life in order to take up a wholly different standpoint, that of spirit; what is required, rather, is that one *supplement* the standpoint of mere life so as to take account of the fundamental ways in which spiritual beings differ from mere animals. That is, one introduces into the perspective of life an understanding of what fundamentally distinguishes spiritual phenomena from purely animal processes; Nietzsche locates the most important difference in what Hegel would call the hallmark of "subjectivity"—reflexivity, or internal division. And one arrives at the idea of spirit by bringing the two concepts, life and subjectivity, into one. One asks, in other words: what would internally divided life—life "turned back against itself" (*GM* II:16)—look like, and how would life thus configured amount to something "higher than" life?

Of course, whatever distinguishing characteristics of subjectivity are introduced into life in order to yield spirit must themselves be continuous with life, or capable of emerging out of life processes alone. In other words, what

distinguishes spirit from mere life cannot be such that it divides the two into different orders of being—things in themselves and appearances, for example, or, in the case of Rousseau, metaphysically free will and mechanically determined nature.<sup>9</sup> Instead, for Nietzsche the principal distinguishing feature of subjectivity—what makes mere life into spirit—can be nothing more than a higher (more complex) organization of the living that develops immanently out of the processes of life themselves.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear, I believe, that Nietzsche intends to distinguish the spiritual (or human) from the merely animal in this way and that he locates the main difference between them in the acquisition of a “soul” whose chief characteristic is internal division, being “turned back against itself” (*GM II*:16).<sup>11</sup> If this is correct, then what fundamentally distinguishes the human from the merely animal is a more complex form of internal organization that gives rise to a more than animal form of subjectivity—grounded in the capacity to “take sides against oneself” (*GM II*:16)—whose source is the instinct of cruelty that, in response to external restraints that no longer allow for its direct expression, has turned back in on itself.

Although there is some controversy about this in the secondary literature, it is important to distinguish the bare instinct of cruelty turned back against itself from the more concrete phenomenon that Nietzsche calls the bad conscience. The development of an instinct turned back on itself is crucial to explaining the origin of the bad conscience, but the two are not identical.<sup>12</sup> The most important difference is that the former is merely a drive or instinct, a physiological disposition to discharge built-up energy of a certain type (cruelty) in a certain direction (against oneself). The latter, in contrast—the bad conscience, properly speaking—involves, in addition, an interpretive apparatus that “hooks onto” this bare disposition, imbues it with a meaning it did not originally have, and thereby makes action on the basis of that disposition possible. The simplest example of interpretation joining together with the disposition to inflict cruelty on oneself to yield the bad conscience (in one of its configurations) is when that reflexively directed instinct latches onto an already present concept—debt (*Schuld*)—and uses it so as to give a specific meaning to, and thereby first make possible, *action* that gives expression to that disposition (or serves as an outlet for its pent-up energy).

I emphasize the distinction between interpreted and uninterpreted instincts because it points to a second feature of human subjectivity that plays a central role in higher spirituality, namely, the capacity for interpretation. As I have indicated, Nietzsche regards interpretation in a very broad sense as a basic activity of life in all its forms, both human and nonhuman. In the case of the latter interpretation consists in imposing a function on some given existent—taking it up and incorporating it into a larger system of purposeful activities that, working together, serve a living organism’s vital ends. Hence it cannot be exactly right

to say that the capacity for interpretation is distinctive of human subjectivity, but there seems to be enough of a difference between the interpretive activity nonhuman organisms are capable of and the kind humans engage in to warrant regarding the latter as distinctively human.

It is not easy to say how human interpretation differs from that of other living organisms, but I suggest three such differences without attempting to determine how they might be interrelated: first, the interpretive activity of humans is self-conscious (or potentially so); second, it is mediated by concepts (and hence by language); and finally, it is evaluative in that it assigns, compares, and measures the values of things, employing, at least implicitly, some version of the general concepts “good” and “bad.” That the last of these is especially important is clear from the emphasis Nietzsche places on “the measuring of values, the thinking up of equivalences” as fundamental to civilization, to human existence, and to thought itself, going so far as to call the human being “the being that measures values, that values and measures—the ‘abschätzende Tier an sich’” (*GM* II:8).<sup>13</sup>

I now want to return to my suggestion that by virtue of the capacities that distinguish us from other forms of life, *human* beings are vulnerable to spiritual illnesses unknown to mere animals,<sup>14</sup> and that such illnesses, while increasing the misery and “danger” of human existence, also create the possibility for higher, more “interesting” forms of spirituality that would otherwise be unavailable to living beings (*GM* I:6). Moreover, in line with my earlier claim that the standpoint of spirit is continuous with that of life, both senses in which human spirituality is higher than what is possible for other life forms—namely, that it involves a more complex form of internal organization and that it is well suited to helping living beings achieve ever greater units of power—are recognizable as advantages of the spiritual from the perspective of life itself. Another way of putting this point is to say that the very developments that make humans ill also create the potential for what Nietzsche calls “great health [grosse Gesundheit]” (*GM* II:24). I now fill in some of the details of these general claims.

The first question is this: what makes the bad conscience a “*profound* illness” (*GM* II:16), a spiritual rather than a merely animal illness? When Nietzsche recounts the events that made the bad conscience something “humans had to succumb to”—the most important of which is their “finding themselves enclosed for once and for all within the spell of society and peace” (*GM* II:16)—he describes the effect the repressed instinct to cruelty had on its bearers as a “feeling of misery, a [. . .] leaden discontent” (*GM* II:16) brought on by the inhibition of instinct, the impossibility of externally discharging pent-up instinctual energy. While this inhibited vitality may be sufficient to make the repressed instinct to cruelty qualify as a sickness from the perspective of life, it does not yet make it a profound sickness; nor, I would argue, does the ceaseless self-torture of the caged animal-human make that condition a spiritual illness in Nietzsche’s sense. But if this is correct, then when (and why) do we encounter illness of a sort that

would justify Nietzsche's description of it as "so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory and full of a future that with it the earth's appearance was essentially transformed" (*GM* II:16)?

If we return to what I said about the distinguishing features of subjectivity, we arrive at a rough idea of spiritual illness: a state of the soul in which interpretation and reflexivity come together so as to produce effects that thwart rather than promote life's defining aim (the production of ever greater units of power achieved through the imposition of organic form on what is initially formless and inert). A spiritually ill human being, in other words, possesses an internally divided soul where one part, making use of concepts that interpret and evaluate, "takes sides" against the other, and in such a way that the discharge of instinctual energy through activity is impeded or hindered rather than promoted. A soul divided in this way—between, roughly, consciousness and instinct—qualifies as an instance of the bad conscience and, so, of that uniquely human illness that makes life interesting and dangerous.

There are two directions in which this initial characterization of the bad conscience must be fleshed out in order to provide a clearer picture of Nietzsche's conception of spiritual illness. Doing so will bring us face to face with two new concepts central to his view: repression and affirmation.<sup>15</sup> The first of these comes into view in thinking about why it is inaccurate to describe the two parts of the spiritually ill soul as consciousness, on the one hand, and instinct, on the other. What is wrong here is the apparent implication that consciousness is not itself instinct, whereas Nietzsche clearly wants to understand its functions as both fueled by instinct's energy and shaped by instinct's aims. Consciousness, far from being a self-sufficient agency governed by its own principles and ends, is the human's "weakest and most fallible organ" (*GM* II:16), a servant of ends that come from foreign (instinctual) sources and that remain for the most part opaque to it.

This aspect of Nietzsche's view of human consciousness finds expression in his description of the bad conscience as originating in the human animal's instinct of freedom being "repressed, pushed back, imprisoned within" until, having been "banished from sight and violently made latent," it is compelled to "discharge and release itself on itself" (*GM* II:17), while the functions of consciousness that accompany these events remain ignorant of their instinctual underpinnings, including, of course, the instinctual ends they serve. Nietzsche's mostly unspoken assumption is that an instinct that can find no direct, outward discharge and is compelled to turn inward necessarily undergoes a process of distortion that makes it nearly impossible for the end it really seeks to be consciously recognized as such by the bearer of that instinct. It follows that the conditions under which the human soul develops and first acquires depth more or less guarantee that in most cases humans will be in the dark about the content of their own souls. This basic feature of the unfavorable conditions under which human subjectivity

comes into being accounts for part of what makes the bad conscience an illness, as well as for the ubiquity of the theme throughout the *Genealogy* of humans being necessarily foreign to themselves (*GM P:1*).<sup>16</sup>

I turn now to the second concept needed to fill out Nietzsche's picture: affirmation, which appears in two forms, affirmation of *self* and affirmation of *life* (*GM P:5*). My claim is that we need to bring in the concept of self-affirmation in order to articulate the reflexivity that defines subjectivity and plays a crucial role in spiritual illness (and health). There can be no doubt that the inability to affirm both oneself and life more generally occupies a prominent place in Nietzsche's description of the especially virulent form of sickness that he takes the bad conscience to have assumed in his own time. Whatever else great spiritual health consists in, a conscious affirmation of self and life is surely central to it. The claim that affirmation plays a key role in Nietzsche's understanding of the reflexivity that counts as the hallmark of subjectivity (and hence of higher spirituality) may seem puzzling at first. For the *Genealogy* contains prominent examples of human beings—the nobles of the first essay—who say “yes” to themselves spontaneously (*GM I:10*),<sup>17</sup> and so, presumably, without the reflexivity that Nietzsche associates with spirituality. Insofar as affirmation plays a role in higher spirituality, it involves a subject “turning around” and making itself the object of its own evaluative gaze. In making reflexive affirmation central to spirituality, Nietzsche might be seen as following Genesis, which locates God's first reflexive deed in his turning around, after six days of creation, to contemplate himself and his own goodness as exhibited in his worldly activity: “then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was . . . good.”<sup>18</sup> To step momentarily outside one's practical engagement in the world, to look back at oneself and at what one has done, and to find what one encounters *good*—these are the constitutive moments of spiritually affirming—saying “yes” to—one's own being.

Nietzsche makes clear that affirmation in all its forms is a valuing activity that operates, if only implicitly, with evaluative concepts such as good and bad.<sup>19</sup> In order for affirmation to be genuinely reflexive, however, it must take place from a position in which immediate, spontaneous self-affirmation has been somehow disrupted (and illness, especially spiritual illness, suggests itself as one possible source of such disruption). Reflexive affirmation involves stepping outside one's immediate location in order to make oneself into the object of one's own “value-positing gaze” (*GM I:10*), where the term “value-positing” seems to imply that in reflexive affirmation the values in terms of which one assesses oneself are in some sense the product of one's own activity. At the very least, in reflexive evaluation a space is opened up between the subject and its values that makes the subject responsible for them (or able to become responsible for them) in a way that the immediately self-affirming nobles are not.

That affirmation in its higher forms is a robustly reflexive phenomenon is suggested by the connection Nietzsche draws at the beginning of the second essay

between it and the source of all reflexivity, the bad conscience. In musing about what meaning we might ascribe to the “long history” of the bad conscience—which is also “the long history of *responsibility*” (*GM* II:2)—Nietzsche famously hints that the conscience of the spiritually healthy, “autonomous” individual might be regarded as the “ripe, but also *late* fruit” of this history, and immediately after this he links conscience with “*the right to say* with pride ‘yes’ to oneself” (*GM* II:2–3). A few sections later, the healthy being’s conscience is identified as the agency that “heartfully says yes” to its own animal instincts (*GM* II:6). And, similarly, when discussing the most dangerous form of spiritual illness that threatens to descend on late nineteenth-century Europe, Nietzsche uses strongly reflexive language to describe the incapacity for affirmation at the heart of that “final illness”: the will turns back *against* itself in a final act of nihilistic self-denial (*GM* P:5). This reflexive denial of self is described as a valuation (eine Wertung) (*GM* III:11) of oneself and of life that is recognizable both as a form of bad conscience (where cruelty, informed by interpretation, is directed against itself) and as an illness. It is a condition of exhaustion, depression, and disgust with life grounded in “the human’s shame at being human” in which “the animal human [has learned] to be ashamed of all his instincts” (*GM* II:7), and which produces a world of “disgruntled, arrogant, and repulsive creatures who cannot be rid of their deep disgust at themselves, at the earth, and at all of life and who, out of pleasure in inflicting pain (probably their only pleasure), inflict as much pain on themselves as they possibly can” (*GM* III:11).

We are now in a position to formulate more systematically how the points made thus far yield a conception of spiritual illness. I distinguish four features of the bad conscience already discussed that are relevant to understanding its status as a spiritual illness. In what Nietzsche calls its “most horrible” form (*GM* II:22), the bad conscience incorporates all four of these features, but there are also less acute, though still pathological versions of that phenomenon in which some are present but not others. In other words, what we have learned thus far about life and spirit enables us to distinguish *gradations* of spiritual illness, an acknowledgment of which is essential if what Nietzsche says about the bad conscience is to be coherent. I discuss these four features in ascending order of their pathological significance.

The first—what I call the “measureless” drive to make oneself suffer—is especially prominent in the following description of the version of the bad conscience associated with Christianity: “[T]his human being with the bad conscience has seized upon the presupposition of religion so as to drive his self-torture to its most horrible severity and rigor: guilt in relation to *God*. This thought becomes an instrument of torture for him. [. . .] In this psychic cruelty resides a madness of the will completely without equal: the *will* of the human being to find himself guilty [schuldig] and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for, his *will* to think of himself as punished without any possibility of the punishment becoming equal to his guilt [Schuld]” (*GM* II:22).

It is more difficult than one might think to say why a ceaseless, unquenchable longing for pain should count as pathological for Nietzsche, since, as suggested above, suffering—even self-inflicted suffering—is a normal part of life. It is tempting to think that what makes Christian suffering pathological is not merely that the sufferer is the source of his own pain but that he actively seeks it out, and in ever greater quantities: “soon one ceased to protest *against* the pain, one thirsted for it instead: ‘*more* pain! *more* pain!’” (*GM* III:20). Even this, however, cannot be the full story since, as I understand the ideal Nietzsche means to be pointing us toward, the individual of great spiritual health also welcomes, even seeks out, his own suffering.<sup>20</sup> It is important to remember that the self-inflicted suffering Nietzsche describes in these passages is, like all concrete manifestations of the bad conscience, *interpreted* self-inflicted suffering. This suggests that the extent to which an unending thirst for ever increasing pain counts as illness depends on how that suffering is interpreted, which is to say, on what function in the sufferer’s life that pain is made to serve and in what relation that function stands to the aims of life. Presumably, the aims implicit in the function one assigns to one’s suffering provide as well a *measure* for one’s suffering, not merely an interpretation of what its point is but also a criterion for its appropriate limits.

A second feature of the Christian form of the bad conscience is what Nietzsche calls its mendaciousness, or dishonesty (*Verlogenheit*) (*GM* III:19). As I have discussed it here, this dishonesty consists in a self-imposed self-opacity—a motivated ignorance, achieved through repression, of the underlying instinctual motives of one’s deeds and attitudes. If it is correct to see this sort of dishonesty as an aspect of spiritual illness, then one component of spiritual health in its fullest form will be conscious self-transparency. It is important to be clear, however, about the status of this aspect of Nietzsche’s conception of spiritual health. Self-opacity is never the most important part of what makes the various versions of the bad conscience illnesses. This is because repression, together with the ignorance of self that accompanies it, is often compatible with significant degrees of vitality, as defined by Nietzsche’s conception of life. Still, other things being equal, self-transparency is, for a spiritual being endowed with consciousness, superior to self-opacity. Or, to put the point in terms that make clear the proximity of Nietzsche’s view to philosophies for which alienation is a central category: self-knowledge—an undistorted awareness of who one is and what one wants—is more appropriate to self-conscious beings than the necessary “foreignness to self” that Nietzsche attributes to “us knowers” in the very first paragraph of his inquiry into the origin of morality (*GM* P:1).

With this idea we encounter the first aspect of great spiritual health that has no analogue in the purely animal realm, which raises the question of how the value of self-transparency relates to the merely biological ideal of health. It is tempting to ascribe a type of value monism to Nietzsche, according to which

the value of self-transparency is completely dependent on the extent to which it serves increased vitality. I believe, however, that this would be a mistake, in part because it would make it impossible to explain the independent value that Nietzsche seems to ascribe to truthfulness, especially to living energetically and cheerfully while facing up to the truth about oneself and the world. Even if Nietzsche shares with Freud the view that motivated ignorance of self is purchased at the expense of energy that could otherwise be invested in healthful living, it is doubtful that Nietzsche (or Freud) locates the value of self-knowledge exclusively in its usefulness for life's purposes. According to the view I think we should ascribe to Nietzsche, once spiritual creatures come on the scene, new values are possible, too—values independent of those of mere life—and there is something more fitting, or nobler, in a self-conscious being's seeing itself as it truly is than in its needing to lie to itself about the basic conditions of its existence in order to get on with life's business. Even if part of the value of self-transparency might lie in furthering the spiritual organism's vital power, its value for Nietzsche seems not to be exhausted by whatever instrumental value it might have for the aims of mere life.

The third feature of the bad conscience in its most acute form that is indicative of illness is probably the most prominent in Nietzsche's text, and it too concerns a spiritual trait of the human being: the capacity for self-affirmation. A human who is spiritually ill in this respect says "no" to himself (and to life more generally),<sup>21</sup> a "no" that expresses a "disgust with life" grounded, as we saw earlier, in a general "shame at being human," which is to say, a shame at all the human being's (animal) instincts (*GM* II:7). Self-denial, then—a kind of self-hatred or self-contempt—is predicated on an inability to take pride in oneself as one is, undistorted by the mendacious gaze produced by repression. This may be sufficient to explain why self-denial is an illness, but its perversity becomes even more glaring when one brings into the picture the more general denial of life that accompanies it. This is seen most clearly in Nietzsche's description of "the *valuation* of our life" underlying the ascetic priest's self-denial: our life "(along with what pertains to it: 'nature,' 'world,' the entire sphere of becoming and transience) is set [. . .] in relation to a wholly different mode of existence that it opposes and excludes *unless* it turn against itself, *deny itself*; in that case [. . .] life counts as a bridge to another existence" (*GM* III:11). Another way of putting this point—one that echoes one of Marx's characterizations of the alienated relation between life and labor in capitalism—is to say that in self-denial, what should be sought for its own sake (life activity within the only world we have) is valued only as a means for achieving something outside it, existence in a "higher" but purely illusory world. As such, self-denial (as well as its opposite, the self-affirmation of great health) is possible only for a reflexive being that is able to take up a certain perspective on itself and make itself into the object of its own evaluative gaze.



One might infer from these scathing descriptions of ascetic self-denial that this configuration of suffering, self-opacity, and denial of life is the most acute form of spiritual illness we can expect to encounter among human beings. Nietzsche explicitly acknowledges the plausibility of this inference but then, just as explicitly, rejects it. For he takes the ubiquity and resilience of ascetic self-denial throughout human history to indicate that it, too, must have some hidden life-promoting function—that even this life-denying attitude par excellence must, in a highly paradoxical and dangerous manner, be able to be employed by life so as to serve, in however twisted a fashion, its own ends. His thought is that for all the hostility to life expressed in its valuations, the ascetic ideal is still an *ideal*, and as such it is able to serve—and for large portions of human history actually has served—as a potent stimulus to powerful, world-ordering activity. As Nietzsche argues in the third essay, Christianity at the height of its power was capable of truly awesome world-constituting activity, drawing not least on its ability to assign a meaning to human suffering that allowed for an affirmation of self and world (even if, in the latter case, only as a bridge to a world beyond it) and that motivated sustained, passionate activity in the very world it disvalued. Even if the values in the name of which Christianity acted are ultimately life-denying, its ordering the world in accordance with those values remained an expression of vitality since, as Nietzsche famously claims, to will nothingness is still to will (*GM* III:1, *GM* III:14).

If what I have been arguing here is correct, then even at its most vital the ascetic ideal qualifies as a spiritual illness. This is in part because it is marked by a measureless thirst for suffering, mendacious self-opacity, and a denial of life. At the same time, however, there is a further feature of the ascetic ideal that makes it an illness (and that points to the possibility of an even more acute form of spiritual illness than Christianity itself represents). This fourth illness-defining feature of the ascetic ideal is bound up with what Nietzsche calls its great danger, a danger revealed in the self-contradictory (or self-undermining) dynamic on which the ascetic ideal feeds, as described in one of the most important passages of the *Genealogy*. Midway into the third essay Nietzsche claims that there resides at the heart of the ascetic ideal “an insatiable instinct and will to power [*Machtwillen*] that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions; here an attempt is made to use force to stop up the wells of force. [. . .] [W]e stand here before a being-divided-into-two that *wills* itself as divided, that *enjoys* itself in this suffering and grows even more triumphant and certain of itself the more its own presupposition, the physiological capacity for life, *decreases*” (*GM* III:11). In other words, even when the ascetic ideal functions as a stimulus to activity (and hence as a stimulus to life), the activity it stimulates results in a stopping up of the sources of its own vitality. In this form the ascetic ideal is an expression of vitality that, in expressing itself through action, undermines the

very conditions of all vitality. This self-undermining dynamic represents the ascetic ideal's greatest danger as well as the most important respect in which Christianity at the height of its power is a spiritual illness. Moreover, this danger points to the possibility of an even graver condition—something closer to extinction than to illness—that threatens to obtain once the ascetic ideal has played out its self-undermining dynamic to completion and has succeeded in exhausting the wells of its own energy. This extreme form of spiritual sickness—nihilism in its most noxious form—may not have yet been reached by contemporary European culture, but Nietzsche senses it lurking on the horizon, the possible if not strictly necessary consequence of the death of God. For presumably that post-Christian aftermath of the ascetic ideal, where the will ceases to will at all, is an even graver violation of life's nature than the paradoxical but still vital will that, fueled by the ascetic ideal, wills nothingness.

In the remaining paragraphs I turn to the question raised at the beginning of this article: in what sense does spiritual illness introduce into the world conditions that make an *ennobling* of human existence possible? What, in other words, lies behind Nietzsche's suggestion that spiritual illness might be "full of a future," bringing with it the "preconditions of higher spirituality" (*GM* III:1)?<sup>22</sup> This, it turns out, is a very difficult question, and what I offer here is at most only the beginnings of an attempt to reconstruct Nietzsche's answer to it.

The place to begin is with the idea of conscience that Nietzsche associates, at the beginning of the second essay, with both "responsibility" and "*the right* [. . .] *to say* with pride 'yes' to oneself" (*GM* II:3). Clearly this form of conscience, a part of the higher spirituality Nietzsche sees as a possibility for us moderns, has some genealogical relation to the *bad* conscience and hence to spiritual illness. At the core of this healthy form of conscience is a capacity for self-discipline that makes possible both self-mastery and, as a response to that power-enhancing trait, self-affirmation. It is not difficult to imagine how the basic psychological configuration of the bad conscience, the instinct of cruelty turned back on itself, can be taken up and employed in the service of a self-mastery that increases the power—over self, over circumstances, over nature, and over others (*GM* III:2)—of the being who possesses it.

But the instinct of cruelty turned back on itself is not merely the source of self-discipline; it is the psychological precondition of spiritual reflexivity in all its forms. The defining characteristic of subjectivity in general, the ability to make oneself into one's own object, requires precisely the kind of internal division—between observer and observed, censor and censored, fashioner and fashioned—that the bad conscience introduces into the human soul. This "*internalization* [*Verinnerlichung*] of the human being" (*GM* II:16) makes it possible to make oneself into the object not only of one's consciousness and knowledge but also of one's own form-imposing activity. Whatever possibilities humans acquire for self-consciousness, self-knowledge—but also self-fashioning—depend on

the subject's ability to stand in a relation to itself that the internally divided bad conscience first makes possible.

As suggested earlier, one form of relating to self that is especially important for Nietzsche is reflexive self-affirmation, where one makes oneself into the object of one's own "value-positing gaze" (*GM* I:10) and says "yes"—or "this is good"—to what one finds there. It is not implausible to think that for Nietzsche (as, in a certain sense, for Rousseau)<sup>23</sup> the ability to take up an evaluative perspective on oneself that is more than immediate, unreflective self-contentment requires as its precondition a state of illness in which innocent health, with its purely spontaneous self-affirmation, has been disrupted. The most prominent example in the *Genealogy* of the creation of a new, value-positing perspective—the slaves' transformation of "good-bad" into "good-evil"—is made possible by a condition of repressed hatred and *ressentiment* that, as Nietzsche makes clear, is a kind of illness (*GM* I:10–11). Given the importance of the ability to take up different perspectives for Nietzsche's ideal of great spiritual health, it is reasonable to suspect that the capacity of illness to generate changes of perspective in those who are ill is part of what makes spiritual illness "full of a future."

The problem with this line of thought—that healthy forms of conscience are made possible by unhealthy aspects of the bad conscience—is not that it is incorrect but that it fails to go far enough. The suggestions made thus far may help us to see very generally how the bad conscience might be spiritually fruitful, but they do not explain how the more acutely ill versions of the bad conscience—those associated with Christianity and its aftermath—offer possibilities for great spiritual health that other, milder versions of the bad conscience do not. Of course, it may be that Nietzsche does not intend to make this claim for the sickest configurations of the bad conscience—perhaps Christianity is simply a regrettable part of human history with no redeeming potential—but I believe that Nietzsche does sense a potential, though by no means a guarantee, for great spiritual health even in the lowest depths of human illness. If this is so, we need to ask what other spiritual benefits, apart from the general capacities for self-discipline, reflexive self-affirmation, and the creation of new perspectives, Nietzsche thinks the most acute forms of spiritual illness can yield. One way to pose this question is to ask, what "preconditions of higher spirituality" are brought about when the most extreme form of the bad conscience—"maximal guilt" before "the maximal God" (*GM* II:20)—is joined together with *the ascetic ideal*?

This is the most challenging aspect of Nietzsche's position on the positive potential of spiritual illness, and here I offer only two suggestions as to how the question might be answered. The first has to do with the kind of perspective Christianity trains us to take on things and on ourselves, as reflected in the fact that that perspective is informed by an *ideal* (the ascetic ideal), where that term is to be understood in the specific sense Nietzsche gives it when he claims that the ascetic ideal has been thus far the only ideal available to

humans (*GM* III:28). There is much to be said about what an ideal in this sense consists in, but two closely related features of an ideal seem especially relevant to figuring out how the ascetic ideal, though an illness of extreme gravity, might also carry spiritual promise. The first is the *normative structure* of an ideal, and the second is the *totalizing* character of the interpretive apparatus it employs in interpreting the world. Both features appear in the following passage: “The ascetic ideal has a *goal*—a goal so universal that all other interests of human existence, measured by it, appear petty and narrow. It stubbornly interprets epochs, peoples, humans in relation to this one goal, it permits no other interpretation, no other goal; it casts aside, denies, affirms, sanctions only in accordance with *its* interpretation. [. . .] The ascetic ideal believes that no power exists on earth that has not first received from it a meaning, a right to exist, a value, as a tool to *its* work, as a path and means to *its* goal, to *one* goal” (*GM* III:23). What makes understanding Nietzsche’s position difficult is distinguishing what is specific to (and pathological in) the ascetic ideal from the more general characteristics of any ideal, including one that might serve as the basis for future spiritual health. There are, of course, aspects of the ascetic ideal that Nietzsche wants to have nothing to do with, but this does not imply that he is against ideals in general. On the contrary, he appears to take the future prospects for great spiritual health to depend on the creation of a new ideal—a combination of valuation and interpretation—that measures and orders all subordinate values, and everything that is, according to a single, overriding “goal.” What Nietzsche hopes to point the way toward, presumably, is an ideal—informed by the myths of eternal recurrence and the will to power<sup>24</sup>—with the capacity to inspire in its adherents “the passion of a great faith” (*GM* III:23), instilling in them a love, an ardor, even a thirst for suffering that rivals in intensity the passion of ascetic priests but functions so as to further rather than undermine human vitality. Such an ideal, not unlike the great “machinery” of Christian metaphysics, strives not to interpret mere bits and pieces of reality but to provide a meaning for the totality of what is—for the world as a whole, for human existence in particular, and above all for the ubiquity of suffering. In other words, this revitalizing ideal must provide an alternative to the no longer credible tenets of Christianity by furnishing an equally compelling answer to the questions, “*wozu* leiden?,” “*wozu* Mensch überhaupt?” (*GM* III:28)—questions that, as I take Nietzsche to be saying, need to find some answer if spiritualized animals like ourselves are to avoid depression, despair, a sense of meaninglessness—in short, nihilism. Christianity, with its version of the ascetic ideal and its interpretation of all that is, has, in addition to having made us ill, trained us in the erecting of ideals and thereby instilled in us a spiritual capacity that, once the ascetic ideal has been undermined, can in principle be employed to promote the great spiritual health that Nietzsche hopes may now be an option for us.

My second suggestion as to how extreme illness might bear spiritual fruits that milder illnesses cannot is even more provisional than the first. It is based on a striking formal similarity in Nietzsche's characterizations of the ascetic ideal at its severest, on the one hand, and of great spiritual health, on the other. The former, he says, is marked by a "being-divided-into-two [eine Zwiespältigkeit]" that "*wills* itself as divided, *enjoys* itself in this suffering," and "in the most paradoxical manner" "becomes more certain of itself and more triumphant" the more it seeks out the suffering that comes from being internally divided—or, more accurately, at war with oneself (*GM* III:11). A more concrete picture of what it is for a subject to will and take pleasure in its own self-imposed internal division is suggested in Nietzsche's description of "the most horrible" form of the bad conscience, where, in language reminiscent of Feuerbach's account of religious alienation, he portrays the Christian as driven by a ferocious, insatiable will to "apprehend in 'God' the ultimate antithesis of his own real, ineliminable animal instincts" and to "reinterpret these animal instincts as guilt in relation to God," thereby "stretching himself on the contradiction 'God' and 'devil'" and becoming "palpably certain of his own absolute unworthiness" (*GM* II:22). The main respect in which Nietzsche's account of Christian spirituality goes beyond Feuerbach's is the decisive point here, namely, that the subject of religious alienation actively seeks out, enjoys, and feels himself confirmed in the absolute opposition he posits between himself and his own ideal, the "holy God," the idea of a being shorn of all the properties—especially those bound up with his own creatureliness—that he despises in himself.

That great spirituality is to be located in a subject's dividing itself into two and then negotiating and enduring the very contradiction it has created was maintained already by Hegel. It is clear, I believe, that Nietzsche means to incorporate this vision of the fundamental mark of subjectivity into his picture of great spiritual health, even if it is not so clear what that is supposed to look like. Rather than try to spell out how Nietzsche envisions this feature of great health, I will have to content myself with pointing out two passages where this intention is made clear. The first is the initially surprising remark made in relation to the opposing valuations "good-bad" and "good-evil" that "today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a '*higher nature*,' a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided into two [...] and of being a genuine battleground of these opposed values" (*GM* I:16). The second passage, located within a discussion of the various meanings the ascetic ideal can have, follows on the observation that "the opposition between chastity and sensuality" need not be a tragic one: "At least this holds true for all well-constituted, joyful mortals who are far from regarding their unstable equilibrium between 'animal and angel' as necessarily an argument against existence—the subtlest and brightest among them [...] have even found in it one *more* stimulus to life. It is precisely such 'contradictions' that seduce one to existence" (*GM* III:2).

Exactly what it would mean to exist as a battleground for opposing values and self-conceptions is an important question I cannot say much about here. But these passages make clear that in the exaggerated forms of being-split-into-two that Christianity introduces into subjects Nietzsche senses the possibility of a great spiritual health, including an affirmation of self and world, that feeds on a love for self-division that, far from being “natural” to animal life, comes into the world only through an illness as extreme as the great forms of health it makes possible.

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## NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989). I have sometimes modified Kaufmann’s translations.
2. This is my argument in Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111–222.
4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 160.
5. See Neuhouser, *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love*, chaps. 6 and 7.
6. Hence Nietzsche’s claim that life activity is a “fitting into place,” or “adjusting” (ein Zurechtmachen) (*GM* II:12).
7. One possible implication of this is that it is primarily a stronger human *species* that Nietzsche hopes for rather than merely a stronger human *specimen*.
8. An organism nearing the end of its normal life span that no longer achieves increasing expenditures of energy may not be ill but simply old.
9. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 140–41.
10. If this is correct, then Nietzsche’s general position on the relation between life and spirit is similar to that of Hegel, who also arrives at the idea of spirit by first articulating the concept of life and then asking what life looks like when the basic features of subjectivity—reflexivity, internal division, self-consciousness—are incorporated into it.
11. When introducing the idea of the instinct of cruelty turned back on itself, Nietzsche describes what has been created as an “animal soul [Tierseele]” (*GM* II:16). The soul described here is still animal because at this point the suffering inflicted by this inwardly directed drive is still uninterpreted in ways distinctive of human beings (for example, via evaluative concepts or in terms of concepts, such as *debt*, derived from the *Ur*-human practice of exchange [*GM* II:8]).
12. At *GM* III:20 Nietzsche appears to equate the bad conscience with “cruelty turned backwards,” but he’s careful to call this the *animal* bad conscience.
13. This marks another respect in which Nietzsche is influenced by an insightful reading of Rousseau’s Second Discourse (Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 162).
14. Another theme of the Second Discourse (Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 136–37, 170–71, 184)!
15. For further discussion of repression, see Bernard Reginster, “Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57.2 (1997): 289–90.

16. This is also the theme with which the Second Discourse begins; Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 124.

17. But do they say “yes” to life, to the whole of existence? I think not.

18. Genesis 1:31 (New Living Translation, 2007). Or, as the more authoritative but (in this instance) less eloquent New Revised Standard Version (1989) puts it, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

19. Schopenhauer, for example, is explicitly said to have “*said no* to life, and also to himself” on the basis of certain values he held (*GM* P:5).

20. See Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 229–35, 243–44.

21. As well as “to nature, naturalness, the facticity of his being” (*GM* II:22), also to the “‘world,’ the entire sphere of becoming and the transitory” (*GM* III:11).

22. For an enlightening, somewhat different treatment of these issues, see Gabriel Zamosc, “The Relation between Sovereignty and Guilt in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 20.S1 (2012): e107–42.

23. Rousseau emphasizes the advantage of taking on the perspectives of others that is implicit in the passion of *amour-propre*. Nietzsche emphasizes different perspectives *of one’s own*, but perhaps imagining and taking on God’s perspective also play a formative role for him.

24. I take this suggestion from a conversation with Maudemarie Clark.